

Claims

What is claimed is:

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1. A method, executed by a server, for providing answers on one or more topics from a set of experts on each topic to questions posed by users in communication with client interfaces, the server being in communication with the client interfaces and the set of experts, and the method comprising:

5 receiving at the server a question received from a user via one of the client interfaces;
routing the question to one of the experts selected using information provided with the question;

receiving a command from the selected expert in response to the question; and
executing the command from the selected expert automatically.

2. The method of claim 1 wherein routing the question to one of the experts includes identifying the selected expert by identification information provided by the user with the question.

3. The method of claim 1 wherein routing the question to one of the experts includes posting the question in a location accessible to the experts.

4. The method of claim 1 wherein receiving a command includes receiving a command to post an answer to the question.

5. The method of claim 4 wherein receiving a command to post an answer includes receiving a command to post the answer in more than one location.

6. The method of claim 1 wherein receiving a command includes receiving a command to refer the question to another one of the experts.

7. The method of claim 1 wherein receiving a command includes receiving a command to post an answer to the question and refer the question to another one of the experts.

8. The method of claim 1 wherein receiving a command includes receiving a command to edit an answer to a previous question.

9. The method of claim 1 wherein attachments relevant to an answer are appended to the answer and wherein receiving a command includes receiving a command to add an attachment to the answer.

10. A method, executed by a server, for modifying the management of separate fora related to corresponding topics, the method comprising:

receiving data identifying a user as an authorized administrator;

presenting to the identified administrator a menu of guides, the guides consisting of a set of choices corresponding to different aspects of a forum;

receiving a selection command from the administrator to select one of the guides;

presenting the selected guide to the administrator;

receiving an action command from the administrator indicating actions to be taken with respect to the selected guide; and

executing the command.

11. The method of claim 10 wherein receiving a selection command includes receiving a command from the administrator selecting the guide to configure the system.

12. The method of claim 10 wherein receiving a selection command includes receiving a command from the administrator selecting the guide to add a new forum.

13. The method of claim 10 wherein receiving a selection command includes receiving a command from the administrator selecting the guide to configure an existing forum.

14. The method of claim 10 wherein at least one of the fora includes a plurality of messages organized as a group, and wherein receiving a selection command includes

receiving a command from the administrator selecting the guide to configure a group of current messages.

15. The method of claim 10 wherein at least one of the fora includes a plurality of messages organized as a group, and wherein receiving a selection command includes

receiving a command from the administrator selecting the guide to configure a group of archived messages.

16. The method of claim 10 wherein at least one of the fora includes a plurality of messages organized as an archived group, and wherein receiving a selection command includes

receiving a command from the administrator selecting the guide to add a category.

17. The method of claim 10 wherein at least one of the fora includes a plurality of messages organized as an archived group and the group is divided into categories based on subject matter and wherein receiving a selection command includes

receiving a command from the administrator selecting the guide to configure a category.

18. The method of claim 10 wherein the fora each correspond to at least one expert and wherein receiving a selection command includes

receiving a command from the administrator selecting the guide to add an expert.

19. The method of claim 10 wherein the fora each correspond to at least one expert, each expert having at least one identifying characteristic, and wherein receiving a selection command includes

receiving a command from the administrator selecting the guide to configure the characteristics of an expert.

20. The method of claim 10 wherein receiving a selection command includes receiving a command from the administrator selecting the guide to add an administrator.

21. The method of claim 10 wherein receiving a selection command includes receiving a command from the administrator selecting the guide to delete an administrator.

22. The method of claim 10 wherein the server receives questions and corresponding answers related to a topic and wherein receiving a selection command includes receiving a command from the administrator selecting the guide to edit a question.

23. The method of claim 10 wherein the server receives questions and corresponding answers related to a topic and wherein receiving a selection command includes receiving a command from the administrator selecting the guide to edit an answer.

24. The method of claim 10 wherein the management of a forum must be corrected manually, and wherein receiving a selection command includes

receiving a command from the administrator selecting the guide to allow the administrator to correct the forum management manually.

25. The method of claim 10 wherein new material is being added to at least one forum and wherein receiving a selection command includes

receiving a command from the administrator selecting the guide to view the new material.

26. The method of claim 10 wherein each administrator has a password used to identify the administrator as such, and wherein receiving a selection command includes

receiving a command from the administrator selecting the guide to change the administrator's password.

27. The method of claim 10 wherein the server receives questions and corresponding answers related to a topic and wherein receiving action commands includes

receiving a command from the administrator to edit a question.

28. The method of claim 10 wherein the server receives questions and corresponding answers related to a topic and wherein receiving action commands includes

receiving a command from the administrator to edit an answer.

29. The method of claim 27 wherein receiving a command from the administrator to edit a question includes

receiving a command from the administrator to edit the title of a question.

30. The method of claim 28 wherein receiving a command from the administrator to edit an answer includes

receiving a command from the administrator to edit the title of an answer.

31. The method of claim 28 wherein attachments responsive to a question are appended to the corresponding answer and wherein receiving a command from the administrator to edit an answer includes

receiving a command from the administrator to edit an attachment appended to that answer.

32. The method of claim 28 wherein receiving a command from the administrator to edit an answer includes

receiving a command from the administrator to add an answer.

33. The method of claim 28 wherein attachments responsive to a question can be appended to the corresponding answer and wherein receiving a command from the administrator to edit an answer includes

receiving a command from the administrator to add an attachment to the answer.

34. A method, executed by a server, for managing the server which has a hierarchical configuration composed of different levels arranged in increasing generalization, the levels consisting of names with corresponding values, the method comprising:

receiving a command to retrieve the value corresponding to a given name;

searching the hierarchical structure of the system for the given name; and

presenting the value found associated with the given name at the least generic level of the system.

35. The method of claim 34 wherein the hierarchical configuration includes a system level at the highest level of generalization.

36. The method of claim 35 wherein the hierarchical configuration includes a forum level at a lower level of generalization than the system level.

37. The method of claim 36 wherein the hierarchical configuration includes a group level at a lower level of generalization than the forum level.

38. The method of claim 37 wherein the hierarchical configuration includes a category level at a lower level of generalization than the group level.

39. The method of claim 34 wherein the server includes an expert level separate from the hierarchical configuration, and wherein receiving a command includes



receiving a command to search for the given name at the expert level.

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40. A method for providing answers on one or more topics from a set of experts on each topic to questions posed by users via client interfaces in communication with a server and with the set of experts, the method comprising:

receiving at one of the client interfaces a question on the selected topic;

transmitting the question from the client interface to the server;

routing the question to one of the experts using information provided with the question;

receiving a command at the server from the selected expert in response to the question;

and

~~executing the command from the selected expert automatically.~~

41. The method of claim 40 wherein routing the question to one of the experts includes identifying the selected expert by identification information provided by the user with the question.

42. The method of claim 40 wherein routing the question to one of the experts includes posting the question in a location accessible to the experts.

43. The method of claim 40 wherein receiving a command includes receiving a command to post an answer to the question.

44. The method of claim 43 wherein receiving a command includes receiving a command to post an answer in more than one location.

45. The method of claim 40 wherein receiving a command includes receiving a command from the expert to refer the question to another one of the experts.
46. The method of claim 40 wherein receiving a command includes receiving a command to post an answer and refer the question to another one of the experts.
47. The method of claim 40 wherein receiving a command includes receiving a command from the expert to edit an answer to a previous question.
48. The method of claim 40 wherein attachments relevant to an answer are appended to the answer and receiving a command includes receiving a command from the expert to add an attachment to the answer.

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49. A server for providing answers on one or more topics from a set of experts on each topic to questions posed by users in communication with client interfaces, the server being in communication with the client interfaces and the set of experts and comprising:

5 a question receiving component configured to receive at the server a question received from a user via one of the client interfaces;

a routing component configured to route the question to one of the experts selected using information provided with the question;

a command receiving component configured to receive a command from the selected expert in response to the question; and

10 an executing component configured to execute the command from the selected expert automatically.

50. The system of claim 49 wherein the routing component further comprises an information identifying component configured to identify the selected expert by identification information provided by the user with the question.

51. The system of claim 49 wherein the routing component further comprises a question posting component configured to post the question in a location accessible to the experts.

52. The system of claim 49 wherein the command receiving component further comprises

an answer posting command receiving component configured to receive a command to post an answer to the question.

53. The system of claim 52 wherein the answer posting command receiving component further comprises

a multiple posting command receiving component configured to receive a command to post the answer in more than one location.

54. The system of claim 49 wherein the command receiving component further comprises a referral command receiving component configured to receive a command to refer the question to another one of the experts.

55. The system of claim 49 wherein the command receiving component further comprises an answer-and-refer command receiving component configured to receive a command to ~~post an answer to the question and refer the question to another one of the experts.~~

56. The system of claim 49 wherein the command receiving component further comprises an edit command receiving component configured to receive a command to edit an answer to a previous question.

57. The system of claim 49 wherein attachments relevant to an answer are appended to the answer and wherein the command receiving component further comprises

an attachment command receiving component configured to receive a command to add an attachment to the answer.

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58. A system for modifying the management of separate fora related to corresponding topics and comprising:

a data receiving component configured to receive data identifying a user as an authorized administrator;

5 a menu presenting component configured to present to the identified administrator a menu of guides, the guides consisting of a set of choices corresponding to different aspects of a forum;

a selection command receiving component configured to receive a selection command from the administrator to select one of the guides;

10 a guide presenting component configured to present the selected guide to the administrator;

an action command receiving component configured to receive an action command from the administrator indicating actions to be taken with respect to the selected guide; and

an executing component configured to execute the command.

59. The system of claim 58 wherein the selection command receiving component further comprises

a system configuration command receiving component configured to receive a command from the administrator selecting the guide to configure the system.

60. The system of claim 58 wherein the selection command receiving component further comprises

an add forum command receiving component configured to receive a command from the administrator selecting the guide to add a new forum.

61. The system of claim 58 wherein the selection command receiving component further comprises

a forum configuration command receiving component configured to receive a command from the administrator selecting the guide to configure an existing forum.

62. The system of claim 58 wherein at least one of the fora includes a plurality of messages organized as a group, and wherein the selection command receiving component further comprises

a current group configuration command receiving component configured to receive a command from the administrator selecting the guide to configure a group of current messages.

63. The system of claim 58 wherein at least one of the fora includes a plurality of messages organized as a group, and wherein the selection command receiving component further comprises

an archived group configuration command receiving component configured to receive a command from the administration selecting the guide to configure a group of archived messages.

64. The system of claim 58 wherein at least one of the fora includes a plurality of messages organized as an archived group, and wherein the selection command receiving component further comprises

an add category command receiving component configured to receive a command from the administrator selecting the guide to add a category.

65. The system of claim 58 wherein at least one of the fora includes a plurality of messages organized as an archived group and the group is divided into categories based on subject matter and wherein the selection command receiving component further comprises

a category configuration command receiving component configured to receive a command from the administrator selecting the guide to configure a category.

66. The system of claim 58 wherein the fora each correspond to at least one expert and wherein the selection command receiving component further comprises

an add expert command receiving component configured to receive a command from the administrator selecting the guide to add an expert.

67. The system of claim 58 wherein the fora each correspond to at least one expert, each expert having at least one identifying characteristic, and wherein the selection command receiving component further comprises

an expert configuration command receiving component configured to receive a command from the administrator selecting the guide to configure the characteristics of an expert.

68. The system of claim 58 wherein the selection command receiving component further comprises

an add administrator command receiving component configured to receive a command from the administrator selecting the guide to add an administrator.

69. The system of claim 58 wherein the selection command receiving component further comprises

a delete administrator command receiving component configured to receive a command from the administrator selecting the guide to delete an administrator.

70. The system of claim 58 wherein the server receives questions and corresponding answers related to a topic and wherein the selection command receiving component further comprises

an edit question guide command receiving component configured to receive a command from the administrator selecting the guide to edit a question.

71. The system of claim 58 wherein the server receives questions and corresponding answers related to a topic and wherein the selection command receiving component further comprises

an edit answer guide command receiving component configured to receive a command from the administrator selecting the guide to edit an answer.

72. The system of claim 58 wherein the management of a forum must be corrected manually, and wherein the selection command receiving component further comprises

a manual correct command receiving component configured to receive a command from the administrator selecting the guide to allow the administrator to correct the forum management manually.

73. The system of claim 58 wherein new material is being added to at least one forum and wherein the selection command receiving component further comprises

a view command receiving component configured to receive a command from the administrator selecting the guide to view the new material.

74. The system of claim 58 wherein each administrator has a password used to identify the administrator as such, and wherein the selection command receiving component further comprises

a change password command receiving component configured to receive a command from the administrator selecting the guide to change the administrator's password.

75. The system of claim 58 wherein the server receives questions and corresponding answers related to a topic and wherein the action command receiving component further comprises

an edit question command receiving component configured to receive a command from the administrator to edit a question.

76. The system of claim 58 wherein the server receives questions and corresponding answers related to a topic and wherein the action command receiving component further comprises an edit answer command receiving component configured to receive a command from the administrator to edit an answer.

77. The system of claim 75 wherein the edit question command receiving component further comprises an edit question title command receiving component configured to receive a command from the administrator to edit the title of a question.

78. The system of claim 76 wherein the edit answer command receiving component further comprises an edit answer title command receiving component configured to receive a command from the administrator to edit the title of an answer.

79. The system of claim 76 wherein attachments responsive to a question are appended to the corresponding answer and wherein the edit answer command receiving component further comprises

an edit attachment command receiving component configured to receive a command from the administrator to edit an attachment appended to that answer.

80. The system of claim 76 wherein the edit answer command receiving component further comprises

an add answer command receiving component configured to receive a command from the administrator to add an answer.

81. The system of claim 76 wherein attachments responsive to a question can be appended to the corresponding answer and wherein the edit answer command receiving component further comprises

an add attachment command receiving component configured to receive a command from the administrator to add an attachment to an answer.

82. A server with a hierarchical configuration composed of different levels arranged in increasing generalization, the levels consisting of names with corresponding values, comprising:

a receiving component configured to receive a command to retrieve the value corresponding to a given name;

5 a searching component configured to search the hierarchical structure of the system for the given name; and

a presenting component configured to present the value found associated with the given name at the least generic level of the system.

83. The server of claim 82 wherein the hierarchical configuration includes a system level at the highest level of generalization.

84. The server of claim 83 wherein the hierarchical configuration includes a forum level at a lower level of generalization than the system level.

85. The server of claim 84 wherein the hierarchical configuration includes a group level at a lower level of generalization than the forum level.

86. The server of claim 85 wherein the hierarchical configuration includes a category level at a lower level of generalization than the group level.

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88. A system for providing answers on one or more topics from a set of experts on each topic to questions posed by users via client interfaces in communication with the server, the server comprising:

5 a question receiving component configured to receive at one of the client interfaces a question on the selected topic;

a transmitting component configured to transmit the question from the client interface to the server;

a routing component configured to route the question to one of a plurality of experts selected using information provided with the question;

10 a command receiving component configured to receive a command at the server from the selected expert in response to the question; and

an executing component configured to execute the command from the selected expert automatically.

89. The system of claim 88 wherein the routing component further comprises an information identifying component configured to identify the selected expert by identification information provided by the user with the question.

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90. The system of claim 88 wherein the routing component further comprises a question posting component configured to post the question in a location accessible to the experts.

91. The system of claim 88 wherein the command receiving component further comprises
an answer posting command receiving component configured to receive a command to
post an answer to the question.
92. The system of claim 91 wherein the answer posting command receiving component
further comprises
a multiple posting command receiving component configured to receive a command to
post an answer in more than one location.
93. The system of claim 88 wherein the command receiving component further comprises
a referral command receiving component configured to receive a command from the
expert to refer the question to another one of the experts.
94. The system of claim 88 wherein the command receiving component further comprises
an answer-and-refer command receiving component configured to receive a command to
post an answer to the question and refer the question to another one of the experts.
95. The system of claim 88 wherein the command receiving component further comprises
an edit answer command receiving component configured to receive a command from the
expert to edit an answer to a previous question.

96. The system of claim 88 wherein attachments relevant to an answer are appended to the answer and the command receiving component further comprises
an add attachment command receiving component configured to receive a command from
the expert to add an attachment to the answer.

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Add
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